PREMERA BLUE CROSS
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UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON, PSYCHIATRY & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES
DIVISION OF POPULATION HEALTH

# Premera Blue Cross, UW Medicine Collaborate on Behavioral Health Integration for Black Communities

## Grant helps three clinics in western Washington implement evidence-based Collaborative Care

**Mountlake Terrace, Wash. – January 30, 2024** – Premera Blue Cross, a health plan in the Pacific Northwest, today announced the company's efforts with the AIMS Center at the University of Washington School of Medicine to improve mental health outcomes for Black and African American communities. Through a $1.4 million investment, three clinics in western Washington will receive funds to implement Collaborative Care, a specific model of integrated care developed at UW Medicine to treat common conditions like depression and anxiety.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that Black adults had equal or higher rates of depression as white adults, yet studies show only 25 percent of Black Americans seek mental health care, compared to 40 percent of white Americans. Through Collaborative Care, patients can receive care for their mental health in the same setting they are treated for their physical health. This can help break down barriers to seeking care and reduce disparities in mental health outcomes.

The clinics selected to receive funds are in areas of western Washington where a higher proportion of Black and African American people live. They include:

- Northwest Medical Specialties in Tacoma
- Northwest Medical Specialties in Federal Way
- HopeCentral pediatrics clinic in south Seattle

"It can be difficult for anyone to find an available mental health provider, but we know there are additional, long-standing barriers Black and African American communities face when seeking care," said Kitti Cramer, executive vice president at Premera Blue Cross. "The Collaborative Care model helps address those barriers by adding a mental health provider to a patient's care team. We're grateful to expand our work with UW Medicine to further support integrated care and improve health inequities."

"Nineteen studies have proven that Collaborative Care significantly reduces or eliminates mental health treatment outcome disparities for Black and African American people," said Diane Powers, co-director of the AIMS Center at the University of Washington School of Medicine. The

AIMS Center (Advancing Integrated Mental Health Solutions) supports healthcare organizations implementing Collaborative Care through systems-level coaching and clinician training. “Studies have also shown that Black and African American people prefer psychotherapy to medication when it comes to mental health treatment. Collaborative Care puts a clinician who can offer those treatments where they are already getting their medical care. This increases access to mental health care and makes utilizing that care more convenient and less stigmatizing.”

Through Collaborative Care, medical providers and behavioral health providers work together with patients as a team using shared care plans that incorporate a patient's goals. The model combines evidence-based care with a team-based approach. It includes regular outreach to patients, measures for whether patients are getting better, proactive changes to treatment if they are not, and support for patients to develop a plan for self-care. UW Medicine has found this results in a better healthcare experience for patients and improved health outcomes.

“Northwest Medical Specialties is excited to participate in this initiative because it will help us broaden the behavioral health services available to patients at our Tacoma and Federal Way clinics, which serve the largest Black and/or African American patient population,” said Abra Kelson, a clinical social worker and Collaborative Care implementation team lead at Northwest Medical Specialties. “With the support of Premera and the AIMS Center we will be able to implement Collaborative Care and this will serve our patients better by increasing access to an evidence-based approach to receiving mental health care in-clinic.”

This work builds on a common goal of Premera and UW Medicine to improve mental health outcomes in the Pacific Northwest. In 2019, Premera invested $10 million in the UW School of Medicine to support the integration of Collaborative Care in clinics across Washington and Alaska. To date, 23 primary care clinics in rural parts of both states have received funding to implement Collaborative Care with support from the AIMS Center. These new clinics are joining this program through this initial investment.

Premera is committed to eliminating health disparities through the company’s health equity strategy. Through this strategy, Premera works to increase equitable healthcare access for Black Washingtonians, Alaska Natives, and rural members to improve their behavioral health and hypertension health outcomes. These efforts are in collaboration with providers, employer groups, and community partners. For more information, visit premera.com/healthequity.

**About Premera Blue Cross**
Premera Blue Cross, a not-for-profit, independent licensee of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association based in Mountlake Terrace, Wash., is a health plan in the Pacific Northwest, providing comprehensive health benefits and tailored services to more than 2.7 million people, from individuals to Fortune 100 companies. For more information, visit www.premera.com.

**About AIMS Center at UW School of Medicine**
The mission of the AIMS Center at the UW Medicine Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences is to improve the health of populations by advancing effective, integrated behavioral healthcare. Learn more at aims.uw.edu.

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